



Large Jail Network Bulletin

Controlling Jail Population Growth: Volusia County's Success Story

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An article entitled, "Jail Population Management, A Proactive Approach," appeared in the Fall 1989 issue of **American Jails**. The article described the joint efforts of the county government and criminal justice agencies in Volusia County, Florida, to gain control over what had become an explosive growth rate in the jail population.

At the time the article was published, there had been no time to evaluate the effectiveness of Volusia County's program. Six years later, however, the county has data that clearly demonstrate the campaign's success.

Background

Volusia County opened its new jail in 1987. Even prior to its occupancy, the jail's initial capacity of 602 had been increased to 899. By 1989, only two years later, the capacity of the entire system was close to being exhausted. The county began discussions during the spring of 1989 toward designing and financing another new facility at an estimated

cost of \$15 to \$18 million for construction and another \$6 to \$8 million annually in operating costs.

However, as the chart on page 14 makes clear, Volusia County officials not only avoided the need for a new jail, they also achieved a downward trend in jail population and—six years later—a 13 percent reduction

below the 1989 level.

The stunning turn-around and cost savings were accomplished

through the cooperation of the entire criminal justice system as well as aggressive leadership and commitment on the part of the county manager and chief judge.

Inmate Population Control

Volusia County had attempted to influence jail population growth beginning in 1985, when the county manager and chief judge had appointed a jail population reduction task force. That group, comprised of members of the local criminal justice community, met on a regular basis to carry out its mandate. It soon became apparent to the group, however, that radical changes and extensive efforts would be required

to effect long-term solutions to jail crowding.

The committee identified several key factors as contributing to the population problem. They also exposed several myths that encouraged a general belief that the crowding situation must simply be accepted. The committee determined that reliable data needed to be

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developed to dispel these myths and to create public and professional acceptance that change was needed. However, it was also clear that data alone would not be sufficient to overcome the misperceptions, which included the following perspectives:

- "We're a tourist community and therefore have a higher rate of crime."
- "Most of our crime results from transients who prey on tourists."
- "The jail population is mostly made up of transients."

These and similar beliefs had led key leaders to accept the jail growth passively without further examination. The beliefs were so deeply held that the committee believed that out-of-town consultants were needed to create a viable proposal for change.

Based on the committee's findings, the county worked with consultants and achieved the following key systemic changes:

- Collection of extensive data on who was in jail, what they were charged with, how long they stayed, and how the cases were ultimately disposed.
- Establishment of a felony division at the circuit court level to replace the previously mixed caseloads of civil and criminal cases.
- Establishment of a blind filing system that provides for a computerized approach to criminal case management rather than allowing a case to proceed solely on the basis of individual motions.
- Establishment of intake divisions within both the state attorney's office and the public defenders' office to allow for the disposition of minor offenses at first appearance.
- Expansion of pretrial services to allow for more informal decision-making at first appearance and

more defendants under pretrial supervision.

Several other minor changes also occurred related to the flow of paper work, agency interaction, and data monitoring. These have also helped the county turn around its inmate population growth. However, the five steps listed have been the most significant factors in the county's success.

As a result of these measures, Volusia County has experienced a substantial cost savings, both in avoiding additional construction and in reducing current operating

costs. In fact, in 1992 the County Council issued a proclamation recognizing the members of the criminal justice system for saving a then-estimated \$78 million. Three years later, the inmate population has grown a total of only 5 percent.

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Ten-Year Change in Calendar Year ADP
Volusia County Correctional Facility

